

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105287](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

According to the Federal Railroad Administration, human error is a leading cause of train and rail equipment accidents.

House Report 116-452 included a provision for GAO to examine the Federal Railroad Administration's C3RS program. In this report, among other objectives, GAO: (1) describes the extent to which railroads participate in the C3RS program, reasons why or why not, and the Federal Railroad Administration's efforts to increase participation and (2) examines the extent to which the Federal Railroad Administration's and NASA's analysis and communication of C3RS safety information reflect leading practices for safety-reporting systems.

GAO interviewed Federal Railroad Administration and NASA officials and stakeholders from selected C3RS participating and non-participating railroads. GAO selected a non-generalizable sample of 22 railroads to reflect a range of carrier type, size, and geographic location. GAO also reviewed applicable statutes and regulations, and identified leading practices for the effective implementation of a safety-reporting system, including practices related to analyzing and communicating safety information.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Federal Railroad Administration improve its communication with the wider railroad industry by sharing information from the C3RS program including (1) broader safety trends and (2) success stories. The Federal Railroad Administration concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105287](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Repko at (202) 512-2834 or repkoe@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

Better Communication of Safety Information Could Improve the Close Call System

What GAO Found

The Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C3RS) is a voluntary and confidential system designed to improve railroad safety by collecting reports from railroad employees describing unsafe situations that have the potential for more serious consequences. According to the Federal Railroad Administration, as of August 2022, 23 of the nearly 800 railroads in the United States participated in C3RS. Participating railroads GAO interviewed cited benefits, including increased safety information and improved safety culture. However, the majority of railroads, comprising approximately 77 percent of the total eligible employee population, do not participate in C3RS. Selected railroads cited having similar internal safety-reporting systems and concerns about the program's confidentiality as reasons for not participating in C3RS. Federal Railroad Administration officials stated that the potential for the C3RS program's growth is significant and noted that the agency has ongoing efforts to increase participation.

The Federal Railroad Administration administers C3RS in partnership with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Both agencies have a role in analyzing and communicating C3RS safety information. While the Federal Railroad Administration's and NASA's efforts to analyze C3RS data align with leading practices GAO developed for safety-reporting systems, their efforts to communicate safety trends and success stories to the wider railroad industry do not. For example, while NASA produces quarterly newsletters highlighting broader safety trends seen in C3RS reports, not all are available to the wider railroad industry on either the Federal Railroad Administration's or NASA's websites. Additionally, the Federal Railroad Administration and NASA provide opportunities for participating railroads to share success stories, but this information is not shared with the wider railroad industry. (See fig.)

The Federal Railroad Administration's and NASA's Communication of C3RS Safety Information Is Not Consistent with Leading Practice on Communication to the Industry

Leading practice	Component	NASA safety alerts	NASA newsletter	NASA safety teleconference	FRA user group meeting	Follows leading practice
Communication to participating stakeholders	Immediate safety concerns	●				Yes
	Broader safety trends		●	●		
	Success stories			●	●	
Communication to industry	Broader safety trends		◐			Partially
	Success stories				◐	

Source: GAO analysis based on National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) information and selected communication leading practices from GAO-10-850. | GAO-23-105287

By not effectively communicating C3RS safety trends or success stories to the wider railroad industry, non-participating stakeholders may be unaware of important and relevant safety information. Further, the Federal Railroad Administration may miss opportunities to demonstrate the C3RS program's benefits to a wider audience through communication of success stories, a practice that could help increase program participation.